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Offering a variety of thoughts and courses for consideration, the theme for this particular issue is electives. Chapters include "How Can They Hear You When They're Snoring? An English Elective for Non-Motivated Students," "'The Literature of Alienation': An English Elective," "Elective Courses in English; A Giant Step toward Individualization and Accountability," "Biography: Too Long Neglected," "Getting Out of the Way: Contracts as an Approach to Individualized Instruction for the 'Slow' or 'Reluctant' Learner," "An ERIC/RCS Review: Elective English Programs," "Drama at the Heart of the English Class," and "Back Pages: A Column of Book Reviews." (HOD)

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Elective English Programs

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE

This issue of *The Leaflet* should find you back "in the groove," or at least wildly searching for it. Perhaps *The Leaflet* can help. Our theme for this issue is electives, not a new subject today but one which some educators once thought offered easy solutions to complex problems. We have learned, however, that as with all aspects of teaching (indeed life itself) there is good (successful-meaningful) and there is bad (fraudulent-superficial). *The Leaflet* offers a variety of thoughts and courses for your consideration.

If you are a bit confused by Paul Janeczko's introduction to "Back Pages," may I answer your questions by saying that there is not another summer just around the old proverbial corner. We had originally planned this issue for May; but, alas, we could not afford to publish it at that time.

The next issue, late fall or early winter, will focus on the "composing process." We are still looking for a few articles for this issue.

May this year of teaching bring us the deep personal fulfillment that remains the "overwhelming question" and which we so richly deserve!

HOW CAN THEY HEAR YOU WHEN THEY'RE SNORING? AN ENGLISH ELECTIVE FOR NON-MOTIVATED STUDENTS

by Kathleen Jacques

Even enlightened, progressive, individualized high schools still seem like prisons to students who don't want to be in school, who don't feel that school offers anything of real value to them. It doesn't matter to these kids if they can choose a modern novel elective over a short story elective because they don't want to read, period. I designed a course for these non-motivated, "can't-wait-to-get-out" students that meets four days a week for a semester and can be chosen by sophomores, juniors, and seniors. This elective is an attempt to involve young people in a program that concentrates on basic English skills and doesn't turn kids off. The attempt has not been 100% effective; the kids weren't easy to movivate. I won't attempt to warm your hearts with moving tales of students who failed English for ten years and are now headed for Harvard, because this didn't happen. However, most of my pupils stay awake in class, participate in the activities; and some of them are even occasionally excited.

The first few meetings of the course are used to explain what I expect of the kids and also to determine what they want to get out of the class. I explain to the pupils that they are required to write at least two sentences in their journals each day. These journals are a private communication between each student and me; I don't show them to anyone. Journal entries are not corrected for spelling or punctuation, but are simply a tool for honest expression. I found that many of my kids were far more open in writing than in class discussion. Several students wrote that their relationship with me changed as they saw that I could accept their real selves, not just their student poses. Many times kids wrote of drug experiences; one girl wrote about an abortion she had undergone. I've never found a better way to get to know pupils as people than by reading these journals. I feel that this type of personal relationship is crucial in motivating turned-off kids.

Another of the requirements for this elective are three critical reports on books, magazine articles, movies, records, poems, concerts, or TV shows. I try to help the kids develop some criteria for judging the media. We frequently discuss and evaluate movies, records, and TV shows in class, making lists of good and bad qualities in each.

Last term the elective was divided into five units: "Values," "Freedom,"

"School," "Newspapers," "Advertising." Two of the unit topics, "School" and "Freedom," came from the class. We began the "Values" unit by collecting a list of bumper sticker slogans. Some lively discussions centered around the slogans "America/Love It or Leave It," "Support the POW's," "Support the Masconomet Football Team," "Four More Years," "McGovern-Shriver." In order to get kids to focus on their own values, I used the brainstorming technique. Students wrote down as many of the things they valued as possible in a two-minute time period, then compared lists. Some kids began to realize that their values were very different from other kids' values. Some brainstorming lists included "a good education," "a well-paying job"; others included "a peaceful world," "justice for all people."

Another project for this unit on values is a personal coat of arms, suggested by Sidney Simon, *et. al.*, in the book *Teaching Values*. My students outlined a shield and pasted in it pictures from magazines, newspaper headlines, poem or song lyrics, and small drawings of their own to represent personal values.

A culminating activity for this unit was a composition on personal values. Students found it relatively painless to write on a topic they had been talking and thinking about for several weeks. They had organized and focused their thoughts in class discussion, brainstorming and selecting material for a coat of arms. Now that they had something to say, students were interested in, or at least not particularly hostile to, correcting and revising what was a personal statement, not just another "dumb composition."

"Freedom" as a personal judgment was explored by the class with brainstorming. Almost every student saw graduating from high school as freedom. They also equated leaving home with being free. We discussed these ideas of freedom and also the responsibilities that go along with them.

Students created a slide/tape presentation to portray their concepts of freedom. They took slides of pictures in magazines and prepared a cassette tape background of music and dialogue. I found most kids really enthusiastic about this project.

In order to explore the unit "School," my class devised a poll to find out student attitudes on topics like suspension, smoking, detention, open campus, and student-teacher relationships. This poll was administered to 150 students in our school and the results carefully tabulated. Some of the results were expected; others, such as the apparent lack of trust between students and teachers, sadly surprising.

I invited the Superintendent and Vice-Principal of our school to speak to the class. The kids asked for explanations of school policy which they

disliked and suggested improvements for the administration of the school. I feel this established a link of communication and increased respect between people who were often on opposite sides of school issues.

The unit on "Newspapers" started with the investigation of how newspapers can distort an issue. Students were asked to bring in front page stories from several newspapers to compare points of view. We also went over newspaper terminology like "banner," "masthead," "vital notices," "feature." Using this information, students wrote a class newspaper.

The final unit, "Advertising," started out with a discussion of psychological manipulation in commercials. We talked about the uses of sex appeal, youth appeal, snob appeal. My students really got into this topic because they spend so much time watching TV. They were already resistant to many commercials because they had learned by experience that the claims were exaggerated or simply untrue. The class worked in groups to create their own commercials, using one or more of the psychological appeals.

Perhaps the one factor that accounts for whatever success I have had with this elective is that it is designed so that students don't feel put down as people because they lack basic skills in reading, writing, and speaking. Once students see that I don't fault their ideas and feelings because they aren't expressed in standard English, that I care about them as people as well as pupils, they sometimes dare to try to improve their skills.

Kathleen Jacques lives in Beverly, Mass.

"THE LITERATURE OF ALIENATION": An English Elective

by Dr. Lawrence Fischer

Introductory Comments

The English elective program has become a basic component of curricular offerings in the high school of the 1970's. Among the electives I have taught, "The Literature of Alienation" has generated considerable student involvement with a variety of selections. It is my hope that the teacher of literature will be able to adapt some of the following suggestions to the needs and interests of his own students.

A semester-long course dealing exclusively with the theme of alienation poses two intrinsic problems. Many students, having elected this course because alienation is often a part of their own lives, could

easily become further alienated or withdrawn after reading such a body of literature. It is my contention, however, that the opposite effect can also be achieved. If one can empathize with the anguish of a fictional character, then one's own alienation can be viewed in a better perspective and can be alleviated, by degrees. This is not to say that one of the overt objectives of the course was its use as a therapeutic instrument; yet, if one of the "by-products" was emotional relief for a few students, so much the better.

The second problem concerns course content. It is quite possible that the study of any single theme for almost five months can degenerate into tedium. Thus, it behooves the teacher to provide a great deal of variety among the various selections and a series of short change-of-pace activities between selections. This article will focus on some of the selections and activities used throughout the course.

Selections

Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye,* a classic case study in alienation, was our first book. Some of the selections in Salinger's *Nine Stories* were not too complex for juniors and seniors. "The Laughing Man," "Down at the Dinghy," and "For Esmé — with Love and Squalor" were well-received. These stories are excellent for short analytic writing assignments.

Today's students typically have weak backgrounds in European literature. Consequently, some variety can be supplied merely by including non-American writers. After our Salinger unit, we spent a few days with Sartre's "No Exit." This was followed by Huxley's *Brave New World* and Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front.* To provide some diversity of genres, some anti-war poems were discussed in connection with Remarque's novel.

After dealing with alienated characters confronting hell, anti-utopia, and war, my students themselves drifted towards an understandable depression. The milieu of "doom and gloom" that I had expressly hoped to avoid was imminent nonetheless. This atmosphere disappeared when the next selection, Malamud's *The Fixer,* was completed. The ultimate triumph of the protagonist was a most welcome denouement — especially since the fate of most characters in the literature of alienation is not so optimistic. My class was even more pleased when I told them about the Mendel Beiliss case, the true story upon which Malamud based his novel. However, a more somber mood was established when parallels were made between the plight

of Beiliss, a Russian Jew in 1911, and the alienation of Russian Jews wishing to emigrate to Israel sixty years later.

I have taught the following selections as part of other English electives; nevertheless, they are quite appropriate for "The Literature of Alienation" as well:

Bronté, *Wuthering Heights;* Heathcliff's alienation is literally haunting.

Capote, *In Cold Blood;* The pathology of Perry Smith reveals a man tortured by his alienation.

Conrad, *The Secret Sharer;* This is a study of alienation occurring on many levels simultaneously.

Green, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden;* Here alienation is intertwined with schizophrenia.

Heller, *Catch-22;* the style: black humor. The plot: a bombardier who fights for survival and retreats into alienation.

McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter;* The author presents five interrelated character studies of alienation.

Miller, *Death of a Salesman;* Willy Loman, unable to achieve the American dream, becomes desperately alienated.

O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey Into Night;* Separately and together, the common denominator for the Tyrone family is alienation.

Orwell, *1984;* The protagonist's troubles begin with alienation, and grow.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet;* The Prince of Denmark is many things — one of which is an alienated individual.

Williams, *The Glass Menagerie;* Laura, her mother, and her brother all experience different facets of a ubiquitous alienation.

Activities

As I mentioned earlier, variety must be one of the keynotes in a semester-long course devoted exclusively to one theme. Part of this diversity can be accomplished by a judicious balance in the choice of readings. Contemporary American novels should alternate with works that are not contemporary and/or works that are not American and/or works that are not novels. A second aspect of variety can be accomplished by interspersing different kinds of short classroom activities between books. This is a refreshing change-of-pace from the usual pattern of read-discuss-essay-test; read-discuss-analytic paper. The following activities, geared towards "The Literature of Alienation,"

can readily be adapted to supplement other English electives:

I. Classroom Procedures

A. Large/Small-Group-Instruction: Occasionally, the same elective is taught by two teachers during the same class period. In our particular case, two student teachers were also involved. With four instructors for two classes, the human resources for large-group-instruction and the impact of small-group-instruction had an exhilarating effect on both teachers and students.

B. Guest Lecturers: Having the right person at the right time can be invaluable. In conjunction with *In Cold Blood,* a local resident, who had worked at the Clutter farm in his youth, spoke. In conjunction with *Catch-22,* a teacher at our school who had been an Air Force navigator for eight years, spoke.

C. Role-Playing: Before assigning Sartre's "No Exit," I divided my class into small groups. Their task was to prepare a scene depicting hell on earth. The results were fascinating.

D. Individualized Reading: Toward the end of the semester, I allowed my students to read different books of their choice. Throughout this unit, I had the opportunity to schedule one-to-one conferences and small-group discussions.

II. Content-Related Activities

A. Poetry: Rather than devote separate units to poetry, I found it more effective to use certain poems with certain books. For example, Amy Lowell's "Patterns" and Stephen Crane's anti-war poems were used to conclude our study of *All Quiet on the Western Front.*

B. Creative Writing: Although the essence of the course dealt with literary analysis and synthesis, a few of the writing assignments were not expository in nature. The most inventive samples of creative writing were generated from this assignment: Put Holden Caulfield in your school or community today. Write an account of his day, using the first person point of view. Imitate Salinger's style, but create incidents that did not occur in the original story.

C. Dramatic Readings: After combining classes, a few teachers read three of Edward Albee's plays during the course of the semester: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Zoo Story,* and *The American Dream.* Both students and teachers enjoyed seeing us in roles other than that of English teacher.

III. Audio-Visual Aids

A. Records: The poetry-song lyrics of the Beatles, Simon and

Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, and others portray alienation in many forms. This activity is particularly effective if the class has a copy of the lyrics in front of them as they listen to the song.

B. Films: The National Film Board of Canada has consistently made first-rate productions. Concerning adolescent alienation, I recommend *Phoebe* (30 minutes) and *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (feature-length).

C. Videotapes of Special Television Shows: During the early spring of 1973 alone, productions of *Hamlet*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and *Winesburg, Ohio* have been televised. Videotapes of these shows could enrich many courses, especially "The Literature of Alienation."

D. The Center for Humanities Cassette-Slide Programs (White Plains, N.Y. 10603): Two presentations (each is 20 minutes long) deal with "An Inquiry Into Man's Alienation." Miniature character sketches of diverse individuals — from Socrates to Van Gogh — led to stimulating discussions.

Concluding Comments

This course, like any course, had its flaws. Certain books did not "go over well"; certain activities were repetitious; and certain lessons were disjointed. And from a thematic viewpoint, one might have to define alienation in its broadest sense to justify the inclusion of certain selections. Nevertheless, most of the students who elected this course in alienation experienced the antithesis of alienation: involvement. From an educational, literary, and personal standpoint, no teacher could ask for anything more gratifying than that.

Dr. Lawrence Fischer teaches English at Wellesley Senior High School in Wellesley Hills, Mass.

ELECTIVE COURSES IN ENGLISH: A GIANT STEP TOWARD INDIVIDUALIZATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

by Gordon E. Wood

My recent thinking about electives and about how they might provide a foundation for individualization and accountability was triggered by an

article in the September, 1973 issue of *The Education Digest*: "English Teaching — Hoax of the Century?" Its disturbing theme surfaced in the second paragraph:

> Whether in response to continuing criticism from colleges and business or . . . because of some urge to overhaul teaching methods every ten or twenty years, high school English departments are wearing a new look these days. These departments have debated over functional grammar and structural linguistics; . . . they have purchased tape recorders and an impressive array of A-V equipment; and they have brought in some razzle-dazzle new methods borrowed from psychology, social group work, and the art department. But they still have failed to produce graduates who can write in a correct, coherent, and intellectually mature fashion.[1]

This thesis disturbed me — not only because this kind of writing is generally inaccurate but also because it renders a flagrant disservice to the majority of English teachers who are, in my judgment, teaching students how to write, to read, to speak, to listen, and . . . to think.

And yet, it is writings exactly like this one, which appear in the press and other media, on which the lay public — now more than ever before — fasten and focus their attention. In their earnest, if not sometimes frenetic, zeal to reduce local school committee expenditures, this same body politic is suddenly demanding *accountability* — from teachers, from administrators, from paraprofessionals, and from all other employees on school department payrolls.

Accountability — the need to account for, explain, or justify one's professional position — is everywhere one turns. It's in Melrose, a suburb of Boston, where a team of fifteen system-wide administrators are this year striving to construct a city-wide Accountability Model; it was, of course, a major theme of the three-day fall conference of the New England Association in Kennebunkport last October; it was threaded throughout the discussions of the NCTE's Conference of Secondary School English Department Chairmen last November in Philadelphia; and it is likewise ubiquitous in the professional literature these days, solidly embedded in references to PPBS (Planned Program Budgetary Systems) approaches to management and in commonly-used descriptors, such as "performance objectives" and "criterion-referenced tasks."

In and by itself, the concept of accountability, at any level or in any area of endeavor, is not at all a bad idea — so long as the people asking for it are logical and reasonable about it and so long as the yardsticks used to measure

it are clearly defined and objectively interpreted. (It was the total absence of these criteria in the article mentioned above which was most distressing.)

As a matter of fact, the explicit opportunity which an electives program can provide to help insure accountability is a substantial and significant aspect of such a program, an idea which will be expanded later. At this point, it is not inappropriate to suggest some contrasts between what the teaching of English has been and what it is now, in the middle 70s, under the impetus of the electives approach.

Whether or not the electives approach constitutes "the most important development in English in fifty-five years," as Robert S. Fay has described it,[2] is not, in my mind, clear at this point. What *is* clear is the unmistakably variegated thrust that the teaching of English has taken over the last seventy-five years.

Historically, of course, English as a subject did not even exist in American high schools until just before 1900. Under the direction of Charles Eliot of Harvard, the so-called Committee of Ten, among other things, established the Carnegie unit of study and — more to the point — set down several consistently rigorous college entrance requirements, including many in English.

A landmark counter-movement, in support of more democratic attention to those students not going on to college, was begun shortly thereafter. In 1911, the NCTE was founded for the purpose of combatting the domination of the English curriculum by the College Entrance Examination Board.

The concern for the non-college or "general" student gained momentum under the whole Reorganization Movement, which was highlighted by the *Cardinal Principles* of 1918. In English this Movement underlay the creation of the "general" course, the "business" course, and the "remedial" course — all of them focusing on pragmatic knowledge, utilitarian skills, and the reading of less classical, more contemporary literature. Coupled with the "college" curriculum, these were the tracks (or ruts!) which pretty much characterized English at the secondary level until the appearance of the movement toward electives.

The year 1970, John Mellon has written, "may one day be looked back upon as the beginning of the Electives Movement in English."[3] Since 1970 at least three publications have appeared which seem to corroborate Dr. Mellon's observation: (1) Linda Kubicek's compilation of fourteen Elective Program Outlines, in September, 1970 (ERIC report ED 041 182); (2) Linda Harvey's similar effort summarizing eleven Program Descriptions, in April, 1971 (ED 049 267) and (3) George Hillocks' *Alternatives in English: A*

Critical Appraisal of Elective Programs,[4] dated November, 1972.

The term "individualized learning" can, of course, be thought of in many different modes. Operationally, the way that Dr. James Squire described it at last October's NEATE Kennebunkport conference, is very relevant: he called it (at the weekend luncheon meeting) "a methodology for learning that students, teachers, and other concerned people may utilize in relationship to classroom, school-wide, and community resources."

On the basis of the reading and visiting of schools in the New England area that I have been engaged in since then, a good electives program ("good" being defined as providing real opportunities for individualized learning and as supplying accountability at several levels) seems to be one that has at least these five components: (1) establishment of written guidelines for the total language arts program, with concise indications of where and how the electives program fits in; (2) scheduling flexibility *and* accompanying cooperation from the people in charge of the scheduling; (3) strong, ongoing administrative support; (4) systematic and/or periodic evaluation; and (5), undergirding all of these elements, the element of *time:*

Time to research, to plan, to talk, to organize;

Time to balance student and teacher input;

Time to write a rationale and course descriptions properly and intelligently;

Time to disseminate and explain such writings to students and parents, and to have a chance to interact with them; and

Time to complile results and to be able to act on them at given intervals.

As a person interested in both the opportunities for individualization and accountability that an electives program can provide, I found the chapter on evaluation, in the forementioned *Alternatives in English,* to be one of the very best sections in the entire book. It is cogent, I think — not because of a bias for or against one kind of testing over another or because of the pointed remarks that Dr. Hillocks quotes from those respondents who disapproved of standardized tests — but because of the thorough and dispassionate examination he makes of the whole testing/evaluation domain.

The direct relationship of that section on evaluation to the whole accountability thrust has crystallized in several areas: in the nine specific evaluation instruments mentioned, both written and oral; in the excellent discussion of attitude inventories; in the incisively objective arguments, pro and con, for standardized tests; in the explicit need for all curriculum writers to translate global goals into classroom-operational terms (pp. 97-102); and in the clearly-written explanation of what the exhaustive research report on the Trenton APEX program showed (pp. 105-113).

It is through the use of these several eclectic measures of evaluation that accountability can objectively *and* subjectively be demonstrated. And this, it seems to me, is a crucial message that educators, especially in secondary schools, ought to be tuned in to.

A final observation about the book has to do with what I consider a much-needed reminder that Dr. Hillocks makes in his concluding chapter: that the elective programs included in his study (seventy-six, from throughout the nation) -- and, indeed, the concept of an elective program itself — are based "on a series of assumptions which require examination" (p. 115). As educators, we tend, I think, to make judgments and render decisions without thinking terribly much about the pedagogical or philosophical assumptions which underlie those judgments and decisions. The five major assumptions that are mentioned (pp. 115-120) and the need to continually re-examine them -- vis-a-vis our own programs, our own schools, and our own communities — are vital, I feel, to the ultimate success of any electives program in any discipline, but particularly in language arts.

It is only through such processes that we can, with confidence and competence, confront and overcome opponents of what we are striving to do in language arts, such as the one cited at the outset. As I see them, the six major advantages discussed in the concluding pages of *Alternatives . . .* represent just the beginning. With the necessary thought, direction, and time that bring about the implementation of any electives program, those benefits, it seems to me, can only be increased.

NOTES

[1]Linda K. Buckman, "English Teaching — Hoax of the Century?" *The Education Digest*, September, 1973, p. 42.

[2]Cited in John Mellon, *English Teaching Today*. Burlington, MA: Mass. Council of Teachers of English, 1973, p. 2.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 3.

[4]Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1972.

BIOGRAPHY: TOO LONG NEGLECTED

by William G. Nicholson
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Although specialized courses in the study and the writing of biography are increasingly being offered in colleges and universities, the genre remains largely neglected in the secondary school English classroom. It is an unfortunate neglect, especially in light of present-day student interests.

Young people today want to see people as they really are, as they really were in history. And we are increasingly being stimulated by the media to know the great and the not so great. It is biography which enables us to know many people intimately, to identify with the subject and to be transported out of our narrow selves.

Good biography is reality, life as men have lived it, largely free from self-serving distortion. The genre differs from virtually all other literary genres which basically seek to evoke reality from illusion. Biography, on the other hand, hopes to attach a degree of illusion upon reality, to elicit from the coldness of a book the warmth of a life being lived. It was Samuel Johnson himself who maintained that the first purpose of literature is to teach the art of living. And no form of literature does this better than biography.

As the weeks in the term passed and as they became increasingly aware of various biographical techniques, the students began to devote their energies to writing their own "autobiographies," an assignment made in the course's first week and, naturally, greeted with groans and variations of "It's too much work," and/or "I have nothing to say!"

Narrowing the scope of their autobiographies to as little as a day, most wrote about a short period of their lives, using the techniques they had learned and often their reading as examples. They were asked to "illuminate character" in a format which had a beginning and an end and to write in as literate and interesting a manner as possible.

The results were gratifying from the point of view of effort and sophistication of approach, and students came to look upon writing about themselves as a logical and, indeed, as a necessary aspect of a concise but rather complete study of biography. A questionnaire distributed to the class at the end of the term included a question asking them if writing the autobiographical sketch had been "a worthwhile learning exercise." All but one of the twenty-eight in the group answered "Yes."

With few changes, Biography will continue to be taught at the Taft School. The genre demands study, accuracy, insight, and "artistry"; moreover, reading in the area provides the student with answers. Biography truly has been too long neglected in the classroom.

There is little more exciting to people than other people. If society has forgotten that this is so, then students during the past decade have certainly made us aware of it again through various movements and new life-styles. There is a new honesty abroad and an increased insistence on the use of imagination. In a time when much of our fiction has gone into plain reporting; Virginia Woolf's belief that by shaping and culling and pulling, the biographer "does more to stimulate the imagination than any poet or novelist save the very greatest" has never been more valid.

Although I had used several biographical works in various English courses during the past fourteen years, last year was the first time I taught a course based exclusively on biographies and autobiographies. The English courses at the Taft School for eleventh and twelfth-graders are term-contained electives, each term lasting some ten weeks. In light of the freedom presented by what was then a new system of term-contained electives and my own deep and abiding interest in biography, I felt that it was time to construct a course dealing with this too-long-ignored genre.

As a teacher in a well-established independent school, I was assured of two matters, able students and complete freedom in choosing my materials, as I began the process of selecting the actual books and laying out the basic structure of the course.

The two sections contained fourteen students each, and the term was to run some nine weeks. The choice of possible works to be read in the genre was almost limitless. With the exception of one book, which came highly recommended, I largely chose works which I had personally liked and which had proven successful with students in other English classes I had taught.

It is a commonplace to state that careful and thorough planning is crucial in launching a new course, and the problem here was accentuated by the wide and uneven choice of biographies available. Guided by the realization that a worthwhile biography must contain, above all else, a good subject, I chose works about individuals in a number of fields in an attempt to provide variety and interest for as many students as possible.

Biography Past and Present, edited by Davenport and Siegel, is an excellent book containing essays on the art of biography and a number of excerpts from well-known biographies and autobiographies. Used intermittently throughout the term, this book provided the students with valuable literary insights into the genre, as well as contact with Plutarch, Boswell, and Strachey along with other well-known biographers. The material in this book is properly arranged chronologically in an attempt to trace the development of the art of biography through the centuries.

Moss Hart's Pulitzer prize-winning autobiography *Act I* proved to be

the most popular book the students read. They were enchanted by the life of the modern playwright, director, and producer. The warmth, vitality, and humor of this remarkable man, thanks to a lively and readable style, came through vividly to the students. The realization that *Act I* is actually an unfinished autobiography terminated by Hart's early death left them with a distinct sense of loss, a tribute to the man and his book. Unfortunately, *Act I* is now out of print, a noteworthy void in books currently available for classroom use.

The Summing Up, W. Somerset Maugham's highly-regarded autobiography, was far less successful. The British writer's wide-ranging overview of much of his life struck few responsive chords in those who read him. Dealing with subjects and personalities too far removed from present-day students and written in a highly subjective, non-chronological form, this autobiography left them cold. It is to the book's credit, however, that the students were left with an accurate picture of a highly egocentric, cold individualist.

But the reading of another complex and egocentric life, that of William Randolph Hearst, a giant in the history of American publishing, proved to be extremely popular. Perhaps W.A. Swanberg's most successful book, *Citizen Hearst* is a long, involved study of a truly complex figure. But few biographies, however long, are formidable to students if they are well-written and deal with interesting, significant personalities. *Citizen Hearst* not only provides the reader with a fascinating life of an individual but also presents valuable insights into a long stretch of American history. One of the nation's leading biographers, Swanberg writes interestingly and well enough of Hearst to leave many secondary school students with a permanent interest in the man and the period in which he lived.

Catherine Drinker Bowen's *Yankee from Olympus* was even more popular than *Citizen Hearst.* Emphasizing heredity and the use of dialogue to develop the personality of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Bowen's work presents the student with yet another way of approaching biography. *Yankee from Olympus* was especially well-received by the less able students in the class.

Employing contemporary means of collecting information, historian T. Harry Williams' monumental study *Huey Long* is yet another means of approaching the writing of biography and another subject from a different background and period. The press of time as the term drew to a close necessitated a careful editing of *Huey Long,* and the students read roughly one-third of the book. But once again an interesting subject and a highly literate style made historian Williams' book a favorite of many.

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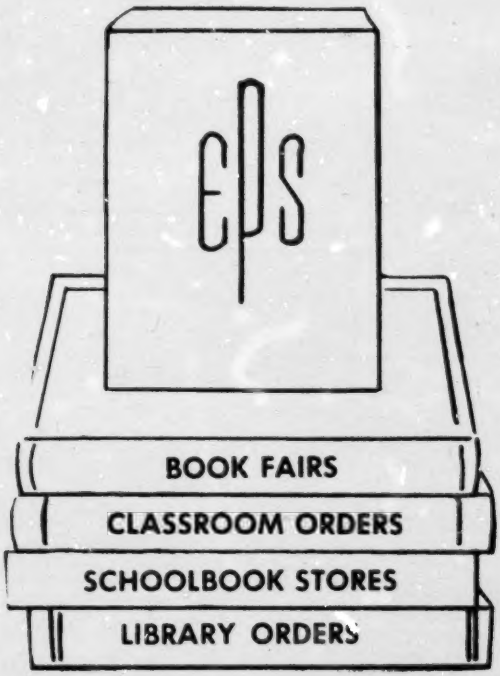

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Getting Out of the Way: Contracts As An Approach to Individualized Instruction for the "Slow" or "Reluctant" Learner

by J. F. Connolly

The "slow" learner or the "reluctant" learner or the "problem" student will find it easier to relate to the contract method of learning than most traditional approaches to English education. The method enables the student to design his own program of study and to become involved in his education. At the beginning of each week the student negotiates with the instructor for a course of study and agrees to the terms of that contract by signing his name. If he fails to complete a contract, he has to answer to himself. The instructor has made every effort to facilitate the completion (it is mandatory that the instructor remains flexible and willing to make reasonable adjustments to the initial agreement) and is able to say: "I have made my effort; Have you made your effort?" If the student does not meet his responsibility, he is forced to realize his own lack of effort. He designed his contract, and he failed to meet his own terms. Being forced to this realization is important. It enables the instructor to focus in on the real needs of the student. Are *we* aiming too high in our expectations? What problem is preventing you from completing your work? Am I failing to meet your needs? Perhaps *we* need to look closer at your program of study? The questions are different for each student, but they all provide the same function: a basis for a closer, more real relationship between the instructor and the student.

As the program is designed, it is difficult for the student to fail. Most students contract for an A, and most students are able to receive the A. Although the main objective is to complete a task, and although the emphasis is on achievement, one important distinction needs to be made. The burden of effort is on the instructor and not on the student. The instructor is trying to teach someone how to learn — it is the process that is important. Total rebellion against the method usually means a school adjustment problem. Once this is recognized, that problem can be given the deserved attention. The contract method is a means to an end. It is a format that guides and rewards the student. It forces him to accept responsibility and assert himself as an individual.

The contract method, as I use it, has two stages. The first stage includes orientation to the method and developing it in the classroom.

In the beginning, I define the parameters of the contracts to the class. Within this basic discipline, they are free to create their program of study. If the instructor has one or two basic guidelines or rules, they will be easier to maintain. In the first phase, I only require that a student must fill out a contract and sign it. With each contract, the student receives a resource sheet of assignment options. From that sheet, he chooses to complete five for an A, four for a B, three for a C, two for a D, and less than two for an F. If he complains that the sheet has nothing to offer him, the instructor has faced his first major task. Another sheet must be made and another and another, until some compromise can be reached. The student will realize the instructor's interest in him as an individual and usually will respond. The instructor must be willing to be in a constant search for ideas in this first stage. He must adapt to the needs of the individual student and tailor his overall approach to meet these individual needs. I have found that ideas begin to gather quickly. When I feel the need for change and new ideas, I go to other teachers, to the school librarian, to old copies of the *English Journal*, and to every corner of every drawer where there might be a possibility for a new idea. Many things fail. But it is the quality of selection that becomes the student's major asset in this program of instruction. The instructor becomes a resource provider — a guide rather than a teacher.

The following is the actual resource sheet that I used to begin my program:

10/2/72

Choose five to receive an A; four for a B; three for a C; two for a D; and less than two will result in failure.

CONTRACT OPTIONS:

1. Read an article from the *Reader's Digest* magazines and write one paragraph on the article.

2. Read one of the E. A. Poe horror stories and answer one of the questions from the handout sheet on that story.

3. Use the *Scope* or *Voice* magazines. Read an article and write a report of two paragraphs in length.

4. Take part in the Business Letter Lesson with the instructor on Tuesday.

5. Use the handout sheet and answer the questions on the *Consumer Reports* magazine article.

6. Take part in the Concrete Poetry Lesson with the instructor on Wednesday.

7. Take the topic sheet I have for essays and write a one page essay on the topic of your choice.

8. Use the *Stop, Look, and Write* text and complete the required work on the descriptive writing handout sheet.

9. Take part in a Values Discussion group with the instructor on Thursday.

10. Newspaper Option — Take the daily paper and choose one assignment from the newspaper option sheet, or write a letter to the editor.

11. Watch the T.V. Tape of Room 222 on Friday. The program deals with the subject of prejudice, and we will have a discussion on this subject next week. A short writing assignment will accompany this option.

12. From the front table, choose a book. There is a wide selection here, and I will help you find a book. If you do choose a book, we will decide on what your work will be for this week.

Sign up for what you plan to do each day.

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday

SIGNED _____
INSTRUCTOR'S SIGNATURE _____

In the beginning the options on the sheet should be kept simple and should provide variety. The withdrawn student should be able to feel secure. The student who has not been able to work in a group should be provided the opportunity to work alone. The student who desires class interaction and group work should have it. The important thing is that the students are addressed as individuals. Each instructor will use the resource sheet differently. Although it seems as if ideas for options may become difficult, one usually has more than he needs. As time passes, the instructor and students find certain items that are a success, and they will develop these to the fullest. The creation of the options is a process that differs with each individual instructor. What one person feels comfortable with may be difficult for another. What is important is that the resources enable the students to choose a method of expression to develop and to become more proficient in the three areas of basic English skills: Reading, Writing, and Speaking. When

the student writes an essay on "What Death Means to Me," the instructor has the raw material to teach *that student* writing skills. He corrects that student's paper and focuses in on that student's strengths and weaknesses. A simplistic approach will produce results. The enthusiasm and positive assertion of the instructor provide reassurance and confidence for the student. In phase one, I tend to concentrate more on writing skills. "Pushing" reading is potentially dangerous. Low level students usually prefer to write rather than read. However, since they do make the selection, the interest is apt to be greater. Only students who want to work in a "reading group" or a "play group" or a "values discussion group" or whatever group the instructor decides to run, will be there. If a student becomes disruptive, the instructor can ask the student the following:

> If you did not want to work in this group, why did you sign up for it?
>
> Would you prefer to change your contract for today and work individually?
>
> If you cannot work in this group, and you do not want to complete another option, do you realize that you will fail to receive credit for today's work?

In a sense, the instructor remains detached from the issue. It is the student's problem. In the first stage of the contract method, I recommend bringing three new options to class each day. This enables the instructor to provide more choice and classroom freedom. Since the student has the choice, he usually will exercise it. If a student fails to work for a day, I do nothing. If he does poorly on his first contract, I know that I have a problem and attempt to solve that problem by trying to find an interest that the student can pursue within the contract system. In the low level class, I have found that motivation for achievement is high. The fear of failure is great. Assuring success in clear, simple terms will eliminate the fear of failure and all the discipline problems that can accompany it. The contracts will order the class. The teacher is the guide and should not be concerned with traditional procedures of classroom control. Freedom within disicipline, simplicity, and flexibility are keynotes of this first phase.

When the students have begun to carve out their genuine academic interest, the second stage begins. At the beginning of each week they receive a blank contract:

STANDARD CONTRACT:
DATE:
MONDAY

TUESDAY
WEDNESDAY
THURSDAY
FRIDAY
TWO HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS TO BE COMPLETED
5+2 homework=A; 4+1 hw.=B; 3=C; 2=D; less than 2=F
Make-Up Work From Last Week

SIGNED _____
INSTRUCTOR'S SIGNATURE _____

After three to five months, there usually is no longer a need for a resource sheet. The students have discovered their interests and know how they want to use the contract system. The following is an example of some of the study programs that emerged in my class:

Reading Lab: A student chooses a book (the instructor must be constantly searching for reading material) and makes a Reading Lab Sheet that includes the date and number of pages read each day. For each day's reading, one paragraph of writing is required. Mystery, Science Fiction, Adventure Novels, and Sports Non-Fiction seem to have the most appeal. Although Hemingway's *Old Man of the Sea* and London's short stories were popular, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and H. G. Wells seemed to capture the biggest interest. Each student is, of course, treated as an individual; and his program must be tailored to fit his needs.

Notebook Projects: Students keep a notebook of writing. One page of writing is required for one day's credit. While the slower student may be still trying to write a solid paragraph, a more advanced student can be working on creative writing assignments.

Project Work Centering On a Particular Theme: For the Mid-Term Exam, I offered special contracts. The student could contract to complete a collection of short stories or a novel and take an exam on it, or he could complete a ten-page typewritten term paper, or he could complete a seven to eight-page Book Statement on books or stories that he had read during the first term. These longer papers became popular. The student designs a Special Contract to complete these theme projects to the satisfaction of the instructor.

Special Contract: Students will try to manipulate the

contract; and I usually let them, providing that the requests are reasonable. We negotiate and draw up a contract. This may mean that the contract is easier to complete for student A than it is for student B. However, I have found that the students recognize this disparity of levels and readily accept the difference. Since competition is not emphasized, this should not be a problem. For the student who has a high absentee rate, I recommend this: Put him on some kind of a point system. Forty points would equal an A, thirty points would be a B, etc. Pay ten points for each writing assignment and five for each reading assignment. This enables the student to experience success on a weekly basis, even if he was only in school one day the previous week. It provides an opportunity for a "new start" each week.

In this second stage, I let some students work in the English office and in the I.R.C's. I get some of them excused from their study mods for the term and have them work somewhere else. I have two students who rarely come to class. They work together in one of the rooms in the English office to complete their work. They realize that they have to fulfill their agreement. Sometimes they have a poor week and receive a C or a D, but they do not let this become a pattern. They know that they have to, as they say, "make-it" on a job and in life. Contrary to the notion that low level students are usually "lazy," I have found that they fear inactivity, failure, and "laziness." They respond positively to freedom within discipline and do not abuse it. In the second stage, the instructor and student have a firm knowledge of their working relationship and of what is expected from each of them. Academic maturity becomes the goal that they strive for.

The method works, and it works well. Students often complain about the lack of meaning for them in school. Many times students have told me that they need to prepare for their life after school. I agree. The student needs to become reliable, responsible, more efficient, and more mature. When the student in the low level class leaves high school, he usually is thrust into the adult world. His adolescence is not prolonged by further education. He assumes the responsibilities of work and of marriage. If the English instructor can best prepare this student for adult life by teaching him the value of task completion with enthusiasm, by guiding him toward self-reliance, by helping him to develop interests that he genuinely enjoys and will pursue in his leisure time, then the contract method of learning is a useful tool in the instruction process. If you accept the premise that we need to make the

English curriculum more practical and relevant for this type of student, the next step is the selection of the method. One approach is to give the student the opportunity to tell you what he wants. If he does not know what he wants, it is time to help him find out what he does want. By opening the doors, the instructor can show the student some of the rooms of learning. The student will decide which ones he wants to enter and discover.

If the method has a major disadvantage, or area of criticism, it lies in the pronounced emphasis on achievement and grades. However, although the program seems open to criticism on this point from a theoretical point of view, it does not seem as subject to criticism in practice. While it appears as if learning can become a commercial process, one does not feel he is promoting philistinism. When the student begins to read because he enjoys it, the contract becomes format. The element of positive reinforcement still exists, but it becomes secondary. While one student uses the newspaper to get a job because it means something to him, or writes his own newspaper because he enjoys it, another student is completing a series of essays on "My World" because he feels that stating his identity is important. The individual approach enables the low level student to develop pride and dignity and recognize his individual worth. The atmosphere is one of cooperation — not competition. This understanding is essential. If the method develops a competitive spirit, it could become self-defeating. The goal is to help the individual on an individual basis. If the instructor believes that this is important, the approach will be successful. It is a flexible program that demands flexible leadership. It is a means, an approach, a form. It helps the students who have had disorder in their educational past begin to order their education. It does not consider the educational past as important. The method is positive in nature, and this positivism is the foundation for building success in the educational lives of students who are accustomed to experiencing failure.

J. F. Connolly teaches English at Brockton High School in Brockton, Mass.

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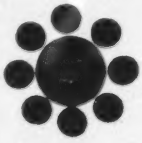

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AN ERIC/RCS REVIEW:
Elective English Programs

by David Isaacson

Except in the most rigid high school English curricula, students have almost always had the right to choose, or "elect," certain courses to fulfill their graduation requirements. But recently a greater number and variety of these elective courses, as well as new conceptions of what these courses can and should accomplish, have developed. In a recent ERIC/RCS study *(Alternatives in English: A Critical Appraisal of Elective Programs,* 1972, NCTE Stock Number 00251) George Hillocks, Jr. suggests that elective programs "may be one of the most significant developments in the English curricula during the last decade."

There are various definitions of what elective programs are, but they are generally understood to mean those programs offered at one or more grade levels which permit students to choose their own courses from a variety of alternatives. Hillocks' monograph — based on program reports, program descriptions, and a questionnaire study — surveys elective programs and examines the rationales, program designs, course offerings, course designs, and evaluation methods of more than one hundred elective programs. He finds an immense variety in the aims, content, scheduling, and scope of these programs.

Some programs are open to all grade levels in a school; others are restricted to a single grade. Some courses cannot be elected unless the student has fulfilled certain preliminary requirements; others have no entry requirement at all. Some are open only to the advanced, others to the average, still others only to the slow student. (A program which is structured according to the difficulty of its content is usually called a "phased elective program.")

Other elective programs are at least partially designed by the students themselves, reflecting what they perceive to be their interests and/or needs. More often, elective programs are designed by teachers and primarily reflect either the teachers' own interests and competencies in certain subject areas or their attempts to anticipate the students' interests and needs.

Elective English programs can offer a number of benefits both to the teacher and to the student. They may, for example, go considerably

beyond traditional subject areas to include courses devoted to selected themes, major genres, minor genres, the media, humanities, or cross-disciplinary studies. For some teachers, this opportunity to concentrate attention on a more restricted subject provides fresh impetus for creative teaching. Elective courses are also often shorter than the traditional courses; and this fact, plus the greater variety of teachers a student is likely to encounter, may create advantages over the traditionally structured sequence of courses. Another benefit presumed by advocates of elective programs is that the very fact that students are allowed to choose their courses may motivate them to learn more.

Numerous other recent documents in the ERIC system discuss elective programs in English. The four documents which follow provide course descriptions, objectives, and curricular guidelines for elective programs in schools located in Minnesota, Montana, Michigan, and California. The programs include traditional courses in language, literature, and composition as well as some nontraditional courses designed to meet current student interests and needs.

ED 045 652 Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota. *Descriptions of Courses Offered in the Elective English Programs of Five Minneapolis, Minnesota, High Schools.* 1970, 26 pp.

ED 045 669 Huntley Project Public Schools, Worden, Montana. *Elective English Program, Grades 9-12.* 1970, 146 pp.

ED 048 284 Palm Springs High School, California. *Elective English Curriculum.* 1971, 48 pp.

ED 044 417 Flint Public Schools, Michigan. *Student Selective Series for High School English.* 1970, 293 pp.

Another group of documents specifically discusses ungraded (or nongraded) elective programs, in which some of the English courses may be chosen by any student in the school. One of these programs divides the school year into six 6-week units, requiring the first unit — in composition — to be taken by all of the students; some of the other five courses can be elected by freshmen and sophomores, and others, by juniors and seniors (ED 046 937). Another document describes a semester program for a two-year course of study for juniors and seniors which distinguishes between the regular and the more challenging courses (ED 049 241). The third study discusses an elective program offering 37 courses in a variety of different subjects (ED 042 761).

ED 046 937 Fort Hunt High School, Alexandria, Virginia. *The Fort Hunt High School Elective English Program.* 1970, 54 pp.

ED 049 241 Arizona English Teachers Association, Tempe. *Flexibility in the English Curriculum: The Semester Elective Program.* Arizona English Bulletin 13 (October 1970): 15-23.

ED 042 761 Collier County Schools, Naples, Florida. *English Curriculum, Naples High, 1969-70.* 1970, 125 pp.

The next three documents focus on phase electives. While the number of courses offered, the length of time devoted to a unit of study, and the content of the courses varies, each of these programs phases its courses according to five levels of difficulty.

ED 048 247 Greater Anchorage Area Borough School District, Alaska. *More Than English (What's Happening in the Senior High English Curriculum of the Anchorage Borough School District)* and Addendum, 1970-71. 1969, 146 pp.

ED 043 644 Jefferson County Board of Education, Louisville, Kentucky. *Phase-Elective English, 1970.* 1970, 328 pp.

ED 043 647 Hardin County Board of Education, Elizabethtown, Kentucky. *Phase-Elective English: An Experimental Program for Grades Eleven and Twelve, East Hardin High School.* 1970, 127 pp.

And soon to be indexed into the ERIC system is a monograph which suggests some of the questions and answers involved in the planning of phase-electives in the Indiana public schools: Indiana Council of Teachers of English. *Some Questions and Answers About Planning Phase-Elective Programs in English.* 1972, (NCTE Stock Number 04854, $1.40 to members, $1.50 to non-members) 39 pp.

In addition to the above documents discussing specific types of elective programs, three recent studies investigate and evaluate elective English programs. One of these studies evaluates the elective program at Scarsdale, New York High School (ED 053 116); the second surveys programs in 81 schools across the nation (ED 054 149); and the third evaluates Project APEX in the Trenton, Michigan public schools (ED 051 220).

ED 053 116 Myers, Franklin G. *English Electives Passes a Test: An Abstract of an Evaluation of the Electives Program at Scarsdale High School.* English Record 21 (February 1971): 52-60

ED 054 149 Hogan, R. Craig. *The Multiple Elective Program in English.* 1971. (Available from EDRS in microfiche only; hardcopy available from author — 466-Rear East Pike, Indiana, Pennsylvania 15701 — $3.50). 124 pp.

ED 051 220 Hillocks, George Jr. *An Evaluation of Project APEX: A Nongraded Phase-Elective English Program.* 1971, 136 pp.

Traditional English programs do not always have to be buttressed by elective programs, and there is no guarantee that elective programs, in and of themselves, can solve problems raised by traditional programs. A program may be no better than its teachers and its students. (For a skeptical view of English elective programs see Edmund J. Farrell's "English from APEX to Nadir: A Non-Elected, Omni-Phased, Opinionated, Untested Oral Examination of What's Up — And Down," *English Record* 23 (Fall 1972): 7-15. But elective programs have offered numerous valuable and innovative approaches to the teaching of English. It is hoped that these documents from the ERIC system will be useful to teachers and administrators planning or currently using elective programs in their schools.

Readers may purchase copies of all the ERIC documents on elective English programs mentioned in this article in either microfiche (MF) or hard copy (HC) from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), P.O. Drawer O, Bethesda, Maryland 20014. Orders must specify quantity, ED number, and kind of reproduction desired, MF or HC. MF cost $0.65 per document; HC cost $3.29 per 100 pages.

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DRAMA AT THE HEART OF THE ENGLISH CLASS

by Frances A. Simonetti

As an English teacher, I resented reading about the Dartmouth Seminar's statement that drama should be at the center of the English classroom, and indeed of the curriculum itself. I think many other frustrated and well-intentioned teachers probably never did understand precisely what was intended by the term "drama" in the context that it was used. The suspicion evolved from what seemed to be a suggestion that the English classes be turned into a school for acting or dramatics — a rather threatening suggestion for many — when, in fact, students could not even demonstrate mastery of basic survival skills of reading and writing. Naturally, teachers who had been prepared primarily for teaching literature, language, and composition regarded classes in dramatic technique as quite outside the content of English. They questioned the need to have students put on plays in class, seeing in this another gimmick perhaps for getting attention, or maybe just for making the English class "fun."

Under the circumstances, "drama in the classroom" was not a very popular notion among English teachers. Today, more than six years after the Dartmouth Seminar, confusion still exists in many minds, even though the means exist for clearing up the issue. Unfortunately, many English teachers are still missing valuable opportunities to vitalize their courses. Actually, there is nothing threatening or unusual about the notion of a dramatic English class. In fact, there is nothing more natural, as I have come to see as I observe English classes where students are actively engaged in the business of exploring and learning because lessons are organized around a notion of drama. The first step toward understanding the teaching of English in this way must be a broader context for the term "drama" itself.

Moffett presents the best rationale and detailed curriculum making use of "drama" in an English class, and his book has to be the most comprehensive resource on the subject (James Moffett's *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-12: A Handbook For Teachers,* Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968). Teachers not familiar with it, or with Moffett, who was himself a member of the Dartmouth Seminar, are missing much in the way of practical demonstration of how to teach by using drama. The book represents some tried methods and activities which serve to integrate a complete English curriculum around classroom drama. The activities center around classroom interaction that underscores the child's natural development in the learning process, a psychological and intellectual movement outward, from the real and concrete world of the self and others, toward the abstract realm of ideas. Although the curriculum is exciting, one of the chief criticisms I have heard of the book, is that a teacher would need

students who have followed the activities through the years, from the kindergarten on, in order to implement it at a given level. This criticism, as Moffett himself would admit, is quite valid; but the educational value of the book lies in understanding the ways in which the students learn as they follow the curriculum. Much careful reading of it and some practice has taught me and my students how to generate a naturalistic and dramatic curriculum for the English class, as well as an effective general method for teaching it.

What I eventually take Moffett to mean by "student-centered" is a "drama-centered" curriculum. English teaching derived from such a curriculum takes a naturalistic development built around the most human activity, using language. Because the most natural, earliest human communication is through action and speech, this type of teaching often takes its start from physical movement as a means of communication or from the oral communication which naturally precedes writing or reading. A child learns how to tell a story rather early in life, and he is even fond of acting out or improvising one when he is very young. He also appreciates stories brought to him through the media at an early age. It isn't until later that he learns the joy of reading one, or even of creating one of his own.

When we teach English in this way, out of the interaction involved in basic ways to communicate, that we teachers create, arises a real life drama, the drama of doing and of talking about something together. Such an orientation toward teaching can easily be adapted and used as a controlling method for teaching English at any level. Unit planning proceeds from real life dramatic situations that the teacher creates, or facilitates, and that take place right then and there in the classroom. Depending on the specific objective, the direction of the classes may continue toward other more creative dramatic situations, and they may eventually generate writing and reading situations in which the students return once more to the real life drama of working together on a project of mutual concern.

A group of student teachers in a course I coordinated this semester, entitled "Practicum In English," decided to implement this "drama-centered" notion with a twelfth grade English class in an urban school. Four of them taught the class as a team for a short time, a scant four weeks, so they had to design their units for immediate results. They first planned two units that used ideas from Moffett's curriculum, one on memory writing (213-218) and the other on sensory writing (183-190). They adapted their material to involve the students in exploration of language possibilities, first by using puzzle games on the elements of composition as a stimulus for a discussion on writing, and next by examining samples of notes taken by people from

various occupations, and also using these for discussion. The exploratory activities gave the teachers an opportunity to observe and ascertain the students' ability levels. To assure individual attention, they then formed groups of five to seven students whom they directed in the process of thinking and verbalizing together as they discussed their own writing. All the writing was done in class, and they generated the final products of the units in workshop fashion; that is, with students and teacher working in small groups to produce the best written communication possible at the time. The results of these first two attempts at using this type of teaching encouraged them to plan a unit on *Lord of the Flies*, using the "drama-centered" technique.

With the idea of drama at the heart of their planning, they designed the next unit from a project point of view. They assigned the students two weeks to read the novel, something about half of them did, and planned a project list that gave students options in which they could demonstrate their artistic ability, dramatic prowess, or creative writing, thereby encompassing the components of thinking, speaking, writing, and reading in the unit. They intended chiefly to use the literary text of the novel as a tool to further study and investigation in as many of the language arts as possible. The first two classes brought the students into direct contact with the projects rather than merely with the novel. The teachers first presented them with the unit plan and then gave them a pre-test on the novel, using a series of pictures related to the plot. The fact that they could not possibly bide their time with this unit soon became apparent to the students, and those who had not read the book as yet also became curious about it. The teachers gave about a third of each of the five following class periods for a chapter by chapter group discussion of the story, and the remaining two thirds of each to individual and group project work. Some students also asked for individual reading time to finish the book. The whole unit finally produced such projects as a panel discussion on symbols and characters, a taped interview of the survivors, a dramatization of survivor interviews, a topographical map of the island, a newspaper, a debate, and a travel brochure. The students admitted they found the experience "kind of interesting."

These students had been labelled by their high school teachers as "apathetic" or "turned-off," and indeed they were. Their pre-"drama" English classes, as I observed, advertised the fact that students, content of the material being treated, and teacher were three worlds unto themselves. These same students, however, became quite involved in the same world of the learning process after the introduction of the techniques described; and they learned quite a bit about language, literature and compositon in a rather

brief span of time. When we tried to isolate the elements in the method that helped to bring about such a change, we could only conclude that the concept of the student-centered curriculum stimulated thinking about the teaching of English as a course in using language in the way in which nature has provided that we use it; that is, in an interactive way, with human beings thinking and talking in a real life situation. Creating such a world for these students, using the creativity of the planners of the unit based in an educationally sound learning theory, obviously made for greater reality in the English class.

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BACK PAGES: A COLUMN OF BOOK REVIEWS

by Paul B. Janeczko
Masconomet Regional High School

With summer almost upon us, I thought it would be the right time to suggest some titles for great summer reading for students as well as teachers. Some of these titles are perfect for making the great escape. Others can be considered excellent selections for class use.

When *Mr. & Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* appeared in paperback about four years ago, it became a runaway best seller with young people. Since then there have been many novels in the same vein that have explored pre-marital sex and the problems that can spring from it. Two recent novels that handle the subject well are *Don't Look and it Won't Hurt* (Avon) by Richard Peck and *For All The Wrong Reasons* (Signet) by John Neufeld. Peck's novel is narrated by Carol Patterson, a girl whose older sister becomes pregnant and decides to go to a Chicago home for unwed mothers. Carol begins to ask herself questions about her sister and her own life. Finally, she decides to sneak off to Chicago to visit her sister. Before she returns home, Carol has discovered some of the answers she was searching for.

For All The Wrong Reasons shows how one boy suffers a nervous breakdown because he cannot handle the responsibilities that go with starting a family. Selected by *School Library Journal* as one of the "Best Books of the Year," this novel is bound to be controversial. The language is frank, and there are some sex scenes that some may find objectionable. It is, however, an excellent novel for older students because it presents many

problems that young people can discuss.

Death is a subject that is receiving more exposure in high school classes. Two outstanding novels that treat this subject are *Admission To The Feast* (Dell) by Gunnel Beckman and *A Day No Pigs Would Die* (Dell) by Robert Newton Peck.

Ms. Beckman's book is unusual because it is the story of a nineteen-year-old girl who discovers that she is dying from leukemia. Sitting at a typewriter in a remote summer cottage, Annika Hallin desperately begins a letter to a friend in which she reviews her short life.

A Day No Pigs Would Die is a novel of love. A young Quaker boy, growing up on a Vermont farm during the Depression, learns from his father that the man is dying from consumption. Robert must prepare to take over as man of the house and come to terms with death.

Everyone needs a good chase novel every now and then, and I'd like to offer three for the summer. *Trapped* (Harper Trophy) by Roderic Jeffries deals with a race against time. Two young boys are caught in a swamp during a blizzard. As police comb the area, they know they must find the boys before the quickly rising tide claims the youngsters.

George A. Wood's *Catch A Killer* is a murder thriller. Young Andrew Morgan witnesses the cold-blooded killing of two policemen and then becomes a hostage of the murderer on an odyssey that will surely end with Andrew's death.

First Blood (Fawcett) by David Morrell presents the reader with more than excitement. Rambo, an ex-Green Beret, is hustled out of a small Kentucky town because the sheriff doesn't like his long hair. Rambo decides to return until he understands the sheriff's reasons. He is promptly arrested. What follows is a magnificent manhunt that does not end until people have died and the fugitive is brought down. Strong stuff, but a fine book for older students.

What makes a friend? To whom do we owe our loyalty? These questions are presented in two new novels for younger readers. In *The Fog Comes On Little Pig Feet* (Avon) by Rosemary Wells, Rachel must attend a boarding school against her wishes. In no time she has broken most of the rules and holds the secret of a runaway girl. Rachel is forced to decide whether to go back on the word she gave the runaway. A Book World "Honor Book," this novel examines the questions of loyalty and authority as seen through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old girl.

Bad Fall (Bantam) by Charles P. Crawford is a chilling novel of evil. Sean Richardson is befriended by Wade Sabbat, a new student. As the two boys spend time together, things begin to happen. At first, everything is for

laughs. The fun and games end in a Halloween nightmare as Sean learns something about friendship.

Popular contemporary novels like *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden, The Boy Who Could Make Himself Disappear,* and *Lisa Bright And Dark* indicate the concern of young people for those suffering some sort of mental illness. *Strangers to Themselves* (Bantam) presents a balanced view of mental illness and forms of treatment. Gene and Barbara Stanford use fiction and nonfiction selections in their comprehensive collection that is excellent for older students interested in the problem of mental illness. *Strangers To Themselves* is also an excellent source book for teachers using novels that deal with mental illness.

The summer can be a good time to catch up on professional reading. One book that's a must is *Readings For Teaching English in Secondary Schools* (Macmillan). Edited by Theodore W. Hipple, this book is a marvelous collection of nearly sixty articles from twenty-five top professional journals. Hipple has chosen recent articles that cover areas from literature to media and composition to speech. This book is worth reading, but it's better to read your own copy because you're going to want to refer to some articles time and again.

It was unfortunate that Lee Bennett Hopkins' *More Books By More People* arrived the day I had papers to read. Unfortunate for my students, that is, because I was captivated by his entertaining and informative interviews. A companion volume to his *Books Are By People* (also by Citation Press), the current book deals with the likes of William H. Armstrong, Frank Bonhan, Maia Wojciechowska and over sixty other authors. Both books are fun books that would be useful additions to your professional book shelf. But be careful not to pick up either when you have papers to grade!

That does it for "Back Pages" for this year. I hope that you found the reviews and comments useful. Remember that we can always use your help. If you have any comments or reviews that you would like included in a future issue, send them to me at 38 Munroe Street, Newburyport, Massachusetts 01950.